

SESSION 12

Christ's message

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Colossians 4:2–6

BUILDUP THEME



BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

God uses believers as His instruments in reaching the lost.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The learners will determine what actions to take in bringing unsaved individuals to Christ.

MEMORY VERSE

“Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Colossians 4:5, 6).

Teacher Preparation

- ☐ The American dream is to work all your life so when you retire, you can live where you want and do what you want. For some that means being on the lake with a fishing pole by 6 in the morning. For others that means sleeping in and sipping coffee overlooking an ocean view.
- ☐ Read Colossians 4:2–6. What picture of the believer's life does Paul paint? What is included in redeeming the present? What does Paul want for the Colossians' future?
- ☐ The American dream isn't God's dream for the believer. He wants us to be good stewards and be prepared for retirement, but He wants us to be mainly about buying up opportunities to serve Him and share the gospel with those who don't know Him.

Session Summary

Paul advised the Colossians to pray constantly, staying alert and thankful as they prayed. He requested that they pray for opportunities for him to declare Christ, and he urged them to seize opportunities to represent Christ effectively.

Session Starters

Option 1—Which Is Better, A or B?

Steps

1. Discuss being frustrated by an eye test.

ASK: Have you had an eye exam and been frustrated by not being able to tell whether lens A or lens B is clearer? How did you resolve the issue? Did you arbitrarily pick one, or did you tell the doctor they looked the same?

2. Discuss the importance of being different from unbelievers.

When unbelievers look at a believer's life, they should have no trouble telling the difference between the believer, "A," and themselves, "B." If they can't tell the difference, then something needs to change.

ASK: What are two or three differences an unbeliever should notice in a believer? (Q1)

ASK: Why is living like a believer so important? (Q2) *The unbeliever's life and where he or she might spend eternity could be at stake.*

3. Transition to the Bible study.

Christ has chosen to use believers as His hands and feet in the word. So, Paul commanded the Colossians to walk wisely before those who are outside the faith. His practical instructions to the Colossians translate well to our lives.

Option 2—Evangelism Similes

Steps

1. Have learners finish the following comparison: Trying to evangelize without praying first is like . . . (e.g., neglecting to put gas in your race car on race day).

2. Discuss the importance of prayer and evangelism.

ASK: What part does prayer play in your evangelism?

ASK: When have you noticed the difference prayer makes when sharing Christ?

3. Transition to the Bible study.

Paul modeled the need to bathe evangelism in prayer. He requested that the Colossians pray that he would be clear in sharing the

gospel. Perhaps it is hard to imagine Paul needing prayer about evangelism, given his incredible track record of successful missionary trips and personal encounters. But Paul wasn't successful because of his personality or tenacity; he was successful because of his humble dependence on intercessory prayer.

Bible Study

I. The Believer's Prayer Life (Col. 4:2–4)

Neither the posture we assume when we pray nor the place we pray is very important, but the reasons for praying and the attitude we bring to prayer are extremely important. Paul shared several characteristics of an effective prayer life.

A. Constant (4:2a)

READ: Colossians 4:2.

Believers must not consider prayer a last resort but a constant resource. Believers should always be in a state of communion with God, ready to breathe a prayer for His enabling, a praise for His blessing, or a petition for His direction. But believers should also devote time to praying to God. Believers who make prayer part of their life's rhythm will find it easier to remember to do it.

ASK: When does prayer fit into the rhythm of your day? (Q3)

We should pray steadfastly—whether our circumstances are favorable or unfavorable. If we fail to pray in favorable circumstances, we may develop a false sense of security and then topple when the first wave of adversity strikes us. If we fail to pray when circumstances are unfavorable, we may plunge into doubt and depression.

In the heat of spiritual battle, Christians may feel like giving up on prayer, thinking it isn't working or God can't hear them.

ASK: What factors may tempt a Christian to give up on prayer? (Q4) *A lack of results, past failures at praying regularly, and distractions.*

God's Word reveals that God expects us to persevere in prayer. Paul wrote elsewhere that believers are to always pray in the Spirit with perseverance (Eph. 6:18). God doesn't promise immediate answers to our prayers, but He does promise our prayers will have great power whether we can see them working or not (James 5:16).

TESTIMONY: What has perseverance in prayer accomplished in your life? (Q5)

Paul's prayers abounded with thanksgiving. See Romans 1:8, 1 Corinthians 1:4, Ephesians 1:15 and 16, Philippians 1:3, Colossians 1:3, 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Timothy 1:3, and Philemon 4.

B. Alert (4:2b)

Paul continued with his instructions concerning prayer, commanding the Colossians to be alert (Col. 4:2).

ASK: What examples come to mind when you think of being alert? (Q6)

Constant praying is enhanced by our staying alert to what is happening around us. Jesus told His disciples to watch and pray so they wouldn't give in to temptation (Matt. 26:41). Peter wrote that the believer is to be sober and vigilant because the devil walks about as a roaring lion seeking to devour those who aren't alert (1 Pet. 5:8). When Nehemiah and his workers were rebuilding Jerusalem's walls, they faced overt and covert opposition. Nehemiah's enemies conspired to fight against Jerusalem to hinder the rebuilding effort (Neh. 4:8). How did Nehemiah and his fellow Jews respond to this crisis? They prayed to God and stayed alert for any sign of enemy attacks (4:9).

C. Thankful (4:2c)

Paul was under house arrest when he wrote Colossians, but he was on top of his circumstances. His prayers were characterized by gratitude, not grumbling. From a heart grateful to God for His guidance and preservation, Paul instructed the Colossians to pray and watch with thanksgiving (Col. 4:2). Paul instructed the Philippians to pray with thanksgiving when they faced anxiety that threatened to unsettle their lives. He promised the peace of God would guard their hearts and minds from overwhelming anxiety (Phil. 4:7, 8).

READ: Philippians 4:7, 8. **ASK:** When have you experienced the peace of God after praying to Him with thanksgiving? (Q7)

ASK: Why is giving thanks to God an essential part of making requests to God? (Q8) *Giving thanks to God before He answers our prayers expresses our trust both in His character and in His ability to answer our prayers.*

D. Specific (4:3, 4)

Think of the book of Colossians as a missionary letter. Paul was a missionary to the Gentiles, and he was under house arrest in Rome. Knowing the importance of prayer, he asked the Colossians to pray for him.

ASK: Put yourself in Paul's position. What might be the first personal prayer request you would share with fellow believers? (Q9)

READ: Colossians 4:3.

Paul wanted the Colossians to pray specifically that he would have

evangelistic opportunities and that he would use them wisely. Most believers in Paul's shoes would ask God to work to release them from prison.

ASK: Why are most prayer requests at a typical prayer meeting about physical needs instead of spiritual needs? (Q10) *We all have a desire to avoid or escape troubling circumstances. We also know that God can deliver us from physical problems.*

Perhaps when believers pray, they should ask for a measure of God's strength to endure their trials, for God to be glorified through their trials, and for their testimonies to provide a strong witness before the lost. Those requests might be more in line with what God wants to accomplish through the trials.

Our prayers for missionaries and for others should be specific too. It is insufficient to simply pray that the Lord will "bless our missionaries and be with them." We should learn from our missionaries what their specific needs are and then pray for those needs.

ACTIVITY: Organize the class into three teams. Give each team a sheet of paper and a pencil and ask the teams to list the missionaries and mission organizations your church supports. Beside each name, they should write one specific prayer need associated with the missionary or organization.

ASK: How did your team do?

ASK: What might we do to be better acquainted with the needs of our missionaries?

The experience of being incarcerated for preaching Christ had not dulled Paul's taste for evangelism. It seems to have enhanced it. Paul longed to reach many more people for Christ. Before being arrested and put under house arrest, he testified that he was ready to preach the gospel to those in Rome (Rom. 1:15). He could not have known then that he would preach at Rome while under house arrest. God's ways may lead us, too, down unexpected paths to opportunities for witnessing.

READ: Matthew 9:36–38; Colossians 4:4. **ASK:** Instead of praying for people to get saved, what might be more appropriate and effective prayer requests regarding the lost? (Q11)

READ: Romans 10:14, 15; Matthew 28:19, 20. **ASK:** What do you learn about God's expectations of you from these passages? (Q12) *That believers would be bold to speak, and that God would open doors for them to share the gospel.*

Paul wanted to make the best of each evangelistic opportunity by communicating the gospel clearly and faithfully. He realized that he was

Christians are outsiders in the world but insiders in God's family. Colossians 4:5 emphasizes the fact that non-Christians are outside God's family, outside the fold, and outside the church. Unless a non-Christian trusts in Christ, he or she will be eternally outside Heaven and inside the Lake of Fire.

A salt lake near Colosse supplied the city and region with salt.

God's witness at that particular place and in the midst of that particular group of people. He didn't want to ruin his opportunity, so he asked people to pray for him.

II. The Believer's Public Life (Col. 4:5, 6)

Prayer fuels a consistent Christian lifestyle. Having exhorted his readers to pray, Paul urged them to live right.

A. Walk wisely (4:5)

READ: Colossians 4:5.

The Colossian believers needed to conduct themselves wisely because they lived in a pagan environment. They could not afford to lower their standards if they sincerely wanted to penetrate their society with the light of the gospel. Their pagan neighbors would not believe that Christ had made a credible difference in their lives unless they observed that difference in their walk and talk. Today, as well, unbelievers dissect our behavior and our words as they look for evidence that Christ has indeed changed our lives. If the evidence is present, opportunities to share the gospel will follow. In this way, we will be making the best use of our time (Col. 4:5).

ASK: What will a believer who is redeeming the time do to get the most out of the opportunities he or she must witness every day? (Q13) *Make plans to spend time with lost neighbors and family members; practice sharing his or her testimony; develop a plan for witnessing; take any evangelism training available to him or her; pray for opportunities and boldness.*

B. Talk wisely (4:6)

READ: Colossians 4:6.

Non-Christians observe our walk and listen to our talk. They should see integrity and goodness in our walk and hear wholesome and helpful words in our talk. If we practice what we preach, we may create an audience for the gospel.

Salt enhances the flavor of food. It also preserves food. When we speak, our words should be in good "taste" and contrast sharply with the corrupt language of so many non-Christians. Also, we ought to season our evangelistic words to fit the taste of our audience. One method of presenting the gospel may appeal to one unbeliever but not to another. We need to know how to answer every person.

TESTIMONY: What circumstances in your life or in the lives of unbelievers have opened doors for you to share about the hope that is in you? (Q14)

A young pastor, eager to make his first sermon a memorable one, shared a few of his sermon ideas with one of the deacons. "I plan to confront hypocrites, gossips, and lukewarm Christians," he announced.

Solemnly the deacon informed the pastor that some rather influential church members fell into those categories. "It might be best, Pastor," the deacon advised, "to preach against witch doctors. There isn't one of them within four thousand miles of here."

The apostle Paul wasn't one to mince words or to overlook the fact that believers should lead a lifestyle far different from that of the unregenerate. His words in Colossians 4:2–6 may convict us, but they were written for our good and for the sake of the lost.

Session Application

Gather

- Small chain clipped into segments of three links (optional).

Steps

1. Remind your learners that they should pray constantly with thanksgiving. Toss a tennis ball to a learner, and have that learner mention one thing he or she will give thanks for when praying. That learner will toss the ball to another learner for his or her response, and the activity should continue until it lags or until every learner has participated.
2. Students record the name of a person to whom they want to witness. (Q15)
3. Have students consider what they will do to connect God with the unbeliever they named. Direct them to the list under question 16.
4. If possible, clip a small chain into sections of three links each. Give a three-link section to each of your learners as they leave as a reminder to fulfil their commitments to do their part in reaching the lost for Christ. They are the middle link between God and the unsaved person.

